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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000246

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV NATO MR

SUBJECT: INCONSISTENT FRENCH TRANSLATION OF NATO STATEMENT  
SEEN TO IMPLY NATO SUPPORT FOR JUNTA'S JUNE 6 ELECTION PLAN

REF: USNATO 136

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Dennis Hankins for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Mauritians, who are prone to glom onto the slightest international statement as a sign of policy signals, are now focused on NATO's Strasbourg/Kehl Summit Declaration released April 4. The official French translation of the Declaration has caused consternation/excitement because it says NATO is "delighted with the prospect of a return to constitutional order." In French the text reads, "Nous nous rejoisissons a la perspective du retour a l'ordre constitutionnel en Mauritanie, qui permettra a ce pays de participer de nouveau au dialogue mediterraneen." This statement has been cited by Mauritians and the diplomatic community alike as NATO's declaration of support for the June 6 election. The French version does not track with the neutral meaning of the English "to look forward" by the positive "to be delighted." This mistake introduces further confusion about the international community's position regarding the coup and the junta's unilateral elections. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) The NATO official English text states (end of paragraph 37) that heads of state "look forward to the restoration of constitutional rule in Mauritania." Nevertheless, the official French translation says they are "delighted with the prospect of a return to constitutional order in Mauritania," giving many the impression that NATO supports the June 6 election. In English, the expression "we look forward" is nuanced, suggesting the hope of something yet to happen, whereas the French translation "nous nous rejoisissons" or, translated literally, "we rejoice" is downright positive and suggests an action already taken. A closer translation to the English would have used "nous attendons" ("we are waiting for") or "nous desirons/souhaitons" ("we desire").

¶3. (C) The statement has already drawn the attention of the diplomatic community in Nouakchott. On a meeting with Charge April 5, puzzled Algerian Ambassador Kaid Chakib Rachid asked Charge about the statement. Upon verifying the original text on the NATO website, they realized the French translation did not correspond with the English. President Abdallahi's "Foreign Minister" Mohamed Ould Maouloud told Charge many in the FNDD were worried about a change in international

community position although he seemed to dismiss it as French undermining of that position through careful word choice. He was happy to hear that the English version of the declaration did not give the same sense as the French version.

¶4. (SBU) The statement, widely published in the Mauritanian press, has already elicited reactions. Readers of the news site CRIDEM commented: "What is this? Did the heads of state in Strasbourg engage in a collective drinking session? Now they are saying that the June 6 election will allow Mauritania to return to constitutional rule!"

¶5. (SBU) Arabic versions translated correctly the English "to look forward" by using the verb in Arabic that means to "wait with anticipation", or "look out for". Luckily, many Mauritians get their information from Arabic sources, which may downplay the difference in the French version.

¶6. (C) Comment: The difference between the French and English version is subtle and in neither case is reference made to the June 6 elections. That said, Mauritians make mountains of molehills and like to see "signals" where they do not exist. It could be that the translation was intentionally misleading (assuming the text was negotiated in English and then translated into French and not the reverse).

European Commission Representative Geza Strammer told Charge a similar French/English discrepancy was found in the soon-to-be released Article 96 decision of the European Union that, in French, would have gutted a key provision of the decision. In that case, the French translator said he had

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merely "improved on the English text" leaving everyone somewhat suspicious. Some will question now if the conflicting translations in the NATO document was a mistake by NATO translators or an effort by the French to "rectify" the language of the declaration. End comment.

HANKINS